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Tutor, Guide, Lead: Examining the Experiences of Peer Tutors

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Running head: Tutor, Guide, Lead

Tutor, Guide, Lead: Examining the Experiences of Peer Tutors

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Abstract

Peer tutoring is a form of academic support in which students who have mastered a particular subject assist peers who may be struggling in that course. While relatively little research has focused on the impact of tutoring on peer tutors, existing literature highlights the interpersonal, social, and academic skills peer tutors can gain from their experiences (Gaffney-Varma-Nelson, 2007; Loke & Chow, 2007). It is important to understand the most meaningful factors in the peer tutoring experience and the conditions that best support skills development in order to better structure programs to maximize the potential outcomes for peer tutors. The purpose of this research study was to examine how peer tutors make meaning of their tutoring experiences and if the tutoring experience impacts tutors' personal, academic, and leadership skills development. Qualitative interviews were conducted with 8 peer tutors from the Math Center, Writing Center, and STEM tutoring program at a small, liberal arts college. Four main findings emerged from the data, including the role of a peer tutor, important factors in meaning-making of the tutor role, rewards and outcomes for peer tutors, and challenges associated with peer tutoring. Based on the literature examined and the data from this research study, recommendations for best practices to improve the experiences of peer tutors are discussed in detail.

Keywords: peer tutors, tutoring, skill development, high-achieving students

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	2
Introduction.....	4
Literature Review.....	6
Importance of Training and Structure in Peer Tutor Programs.....	6
Personal Growth and Skill Development of Tutors.....	9
Academic Skills and Increased Learning.....	13
Difficulties Associated with Peer Tutoring.....	17
Project Plan.....	19
Findings.....	23
The Role of a Peer Tutor.....	23
Important Factors in Meaning-Making of the Tutor Role.....	25
Rewards and Outcomes of Tutoring.....	28
Challenges Associated with Tutoring.....	31
Recommendations.....	34
Recommendation #1.....	34
Recommendation #2.....	37
Recommendation #3.....	40
Recommendation #4.....	43
Conclusion.....	47
References.....	50
Appendices.....	52
Appendix A-Interview Protocol.....	52
Appendix B-Peer Tutor Coordinator Position Description.....	53
Appendix C-Departmental Tutor Program Learning Outcomes.....	54
Appendix D-Peer Tutor Mentor Program Learning Outcomes.....	55

Introduction

Peer tutoring is a popular model of academic support in which students are recruited to provide one-on-one or group instruction and assistance on course content to their peers. The students recruited to instruct their peers are called tutors, while the students who receive the tutoring are known as tutees (Roscoe & Chi, 2007). Peer tutoring is typically characterized by specific role-taking, a focus on curriculum content, and some sort of training for the tutors (Topping, 1996). Peer tutoring models vary in the degree to which peer tutors are involved in the courses they are tutoring, the level of responsibility placed on peer tutors, and the mandating of utilization of peer tutoring services. One common model of peer tutoring, which is the focus of this Capstone, is dyadic and small-group tutoring, in which a tutor works with one tutee or a small group of tutees to help them gain a better understanding of course material (Topping, 1996). This model is typically fixed-role, meaning that the students always assume the same roles as tutor and tutee in the context of that particular course, but it is not uncommon for peer tutors to also utilize tutoring in their own academic pursuits, especially across disciplines.

Much of the literature on peer tutoring has focused on the benefits for and retention of the tutees. Relatively little attention, particularly in the United States, has been paid to the impact for the peer tutors or the meaning the experience holds for these students. Researchers have found that peer tutors can develop leadership, interpersonal skills, and academic skills through their experiences (Arco-Tirado, Fernandez-Martin, & Fernandez-Balboa, 2011; Gafney & Varman-Nelson, 2007; Loke & Chow, 2007; Micari, Gould, & Lainez, 2010). Along with skill development, peer tutoring can also improve tutors' learning strategies, particularly their metacognitive skills (Backer, Keer, & Valcke, 2012; Roscoe & Chi, 2007, 2008; Roscoe, 2014). Metacognition is defined as “the ability to reflect upon, understand, manipulate, and regulate

one's cognitive activities during learning" (Efkiides, 2008; Meijer et al., 2006, as cited in Backer, Keer, & Valcke, 2012, p.560).

Given the potential outcomes for peer tutors, it is important to better understand the most salient factors in the experiences of peer tutors and the conditions that best support the development of interpersonal, social, and academic skills. Being a peer tutor can provide an impactful opportunity to engage our institutions' high-achieving students in meaningful campus involvement. The relative lack of literature on this topic, especially research on peer tutors in the United States, also highlights the importance of deepening our understanding about how peer tutoring programs can benefit peer tutors. In light of this, this Capstone project will be guided by the research questions: How do peer tutors make meaning of their experiences? Does being a peer tutor impact students' personal, academic, and leadership development? Does the amount of training a peer tutor receives have any impact on this development? To answer these questions, I conducted one-on-one interviews with eight peer tutors at Lotus Blossom College from three different tutoring programs on campus: the Math Center, the Writing Center, and the STEM tutoring program. All three of these programs operate independently from one another, but provide their peer tutors with similar training content, structure, and a community of tutors. The goal of this study was to gain a better understanding of how peer tutors view their experiences, the ways in which peer tutors benefit from these experiences, and the factors that influence these outcomes. This information is important for improving practice because by better understanding what makes peer tutoring meaningful for tutors, tutoring programs will be able to implement better orientation, training, and structure into their tutoring programs, thereby increasing the potential benefits to tutors.

Literature Review

In general, much of the existing literature on peer tutoring focuses on the impact of such programs on the learning and retention of the tutee, rather than the tutor. As a result, there is a gap in the literature on the experiences of peer tutors, particularly in the United States, with a good number of studies on peer tutor experiences and outcomes conducted in European and Asian contexts. It should be noted that the literature discussed in this paper reflects this, and therefore includes a handful of European, Asian, and Australian studies. I determined that the findings of these studies were applicable to my research question and important in understanding the totality of literature on the experiences of peer tutors. Research on the experiences of peer tutors, though conducted across a variety of different program models, has largely focused on three different areas: the importance of training and structure in peer tutor programs, personal growth and skill development of peer tutors, and increased learning as a result of being a peer tutor.

Importance of Training and Structure in Peer Tutor Programs

A number of researchers have focused on the importance of program structure and training content on tutors' overall preparation, experience, and development. Rae & Baillie (2005) conducted a study at a university in the United Kingdom to determine if the experience of being a peer tutor in the peer-assisted learning (PAL) module is meaningful for participating students. In the PAL module, 14 third year psychology majors worked in pairs as peer tutors for first year psychology students to help the tutees with general study skills and strategies on how to be a successful psychology student (Rae & Baillie, 2005). The tutors could earn academic credit for their participation and were asked to keep reflective journals throughout their experience, participate in seminars with other peer tutors, and provide written evaluations of the program.

The tutors reported that the group workshops and reflective discussions, particularly on boundaries and the tutor role, were instrumental in the development of meaning meaning about and sense of confidence in their new role (Rae & Baillie, 2005). Rae & Baillie (2005) also found that peer tutors in the PAL module reported overall positive views of the role of peer tutors and found the greatest satisfaction with their role when they had a specific task to accomplish with the tutee. The study highlighted the importance of giving tutors opportunities to reflect on their experiences and to discuss their roles as peer tutors in order to facilitate confidence in that role and allow them to make meaning of their experiences.

Similarly, Calma (2013) also examined the facets of a tutoring program structure and training that new tutors rated as most helpful in their adjustments to their new roles. Calma (2013) analyzed the questionnaires of 343 peer tutors from 2007-2010 at an Australian university to explore the ways in which peer tutor programs can help tutors transition into their new roles. The program involved an initial training session, an observation, and periodic development sessions led by the staff in the different academic departments the students tutored in. New tutors reported that the most useful aspects of the program were interacting with fellow new tutors and other tutors, having head tutors as a resource for help, training discussions of the characteristics of a good tutor, and training on how to conduct a tutorial. New tutors also suggested adding more case studies and observations of experienced tutors to the training curriculum to make it more effective (Calma, 2013). Although the tutors in this study would be more akin to a teaching assistant position in the United States higher education system, the tutors were either seniors or graduate students, so they are still similar in age and development to the peer tutors at Lotus Blossom. While the tutors in this program may have had more responsibility than most traditional peer tutors, this study shows the importance of training, the use of applicable case

studies, understanding the characteristics of the new role, and having a community of fellow tutors to discuss experiences with in helping tutors transition into their new roles.

While the previous studies focused on the importance of training for peer tutors' role development, other researchers have focused on the importance of training tutors in academic skills. Griswold (2006) interviewed the undergraduate and graduate student staff of the peer writing center at a large state university to determine the tutors' attitudes towards and knowledge of teaching critical reading strategies. All new tutors attend a six-hour orientation and training and were enrolled in a 3-unit upper level course on tutoring, in addition to the bi-weekly staff meetings and staff development opportunities throughout the semester required of all tutors. Griswold (2006) conducted individual interviews with each of the eleven tutors, asking about their personal experiences learning to read and how they saw teaching tutees how to read as an aspect of their work as tutors. The researcher found that despite all of this training and development, the tutors interviewed were unsure how to apply their own personal reading skills and concepts to their tutoring to help improve tutees' critical reading skills. The peer tutors reported that while they understood the importance of critical reading and felt confident in their own skills, they felt inadequate to communicate these strategies to the tutee without knowledge of formal teaching reading theory (Griswold, 2006). As a result, Griswold (2006) recommended incorporating specific knowledge and different strategies of reading into tutor training, as well as highlighting the importance and usefulness of the tutors' own informal theories and strategies. The studies presented in this section indicate the importance of training and program structure in shaping peer tutors' experiences.

Personal Growth and Skill Development of Tutors

Other researchers have focused on the potential personal growth and skill development outcomes for peer tutors. Gafney & Varma-Nelson (2007) conducted a mixed methods survey of the long-term impact of 119 peer leaders in a peer-led team chemistry workshop program at eleven institutions across the United States. Differing slightly from traditional peer tutoring models, in these workshops peer leaders were responsible for small-group workshops integrated into the structure of the course (Gafney & Varma-Nelson). The three section survey asked former peer leaders about the impact of different workshop activities on their own learning, benefits gained by peer leaders from the experience, and an open-ended section asking about the impact of being a peer leader on the participants' future decisions. Gafney & Varma-Nelson (2007) found that the former peer leaders believed that the experience improved their presentation skills, teamwork capabilities, communication skills, and confidence in front of a group through their participation in the program. For 29% and 10% of respondents respectively, the experience also improved their interest in and appreciation for teaching and their confidence in studying science (Gafney & Varma-Nelson, 2007). Although the peer leaders in this program were initially selected for the position due to their communication skills and willingness to help students, possibly biasing the amount of personal growth they report, this study still shows the important role peer tutoring can play in the continued development of these interpersonal skills.

Similarly, Loke & Chow (2007) found that peer tutoring also played an important role in the skills development for nursing student peer tutors. This study, conducted in Hong Kong, examined the experiences of fourteen year-three nursing students who served as peer tutors to 16 second-year nursing students (Loke & Chow, 2007). The peer tutors were responsible for attending a training workshop at the beginning of the semester where they received tutoring

guidelines, providing ten weekly one-on-one tutoring sessions for the tutees, and participating in group meetings held by the researchers to discuss their tutoring experiences. Through focus groups and interviews, the peer tutors reported an overwhelmingly positive experience and attributed their increased skill in communication, empathy, time management, and sense of responsibility to this tutoring experience (Loke & Chow, 2007). Loke & Chow (2007) also found that the peer tutors believed they benefited socially from being a part of a community of tutors and tutees. This study shows the role of the peer tutoring experience and the community of peers in the perceived personal development of peer tutors.

Social skills development appears to be a meaningful outcome of peer tutoring, as noted by the researchers above as well as Arco-Tirado, Fernandez-Martin, & Fernandez-Balboa (2011). The researchers conducted pre- and post-test measures on 41 senior or graduate peer tutors and one hundred first year tutees in Civil Engineering, Economics, Pharmacy, and Chemical Engineering. The goal of the study was to determine if involvement in the program impacted the first year students' GPA, performance rate, and learning strategies as well as the learning strategies and social skills of the peer tutors. The first year students were assigned to either the experimental group (who received ten 90-minute tutoring sessions over the semester) or control group (who received no tutoring), while all peer tutors underwent four three hour trainings on planning, time management, cognitive and metacognitive learning strategies, and motivational strategies. Arco-Tirado et al. (2011) found that while peer tutors showed gains across social skills, including communication with others, there were only statistically significant post-test gains in boundary-setting social skills needed to manage and take control of interactions with peers, such as being able to say no and successfully wrapping up interactions. While these abilities may not appear positive, these items were included in the instrument used by the

researchers, Gismero's A Social Skills Scale (2000), to indicate the ability to take leadership in interactions with others. Being able to say no when a tutee may ask for something unrealistic or unethical, and understanding how to properly wrap up tutoring sessions, are important skills for tutors to utilize to successfully navigate interactions with their fellow students. Successfully wrapping up interactions indicates an ability to set boundaries, navigate, and lead a social situation with others. These social skills are important for good peer tutoring because as the name suggests, tutors are often working with fellow students, whom they may know on a personal level or where there may be a perceived power difference if the tutee is older or more popular than the tutor. This outside social dynamic could potentially result in the peer tutor feeling pressured to give the tutee the answers to a problem rather than guiding them through a better understanding of the material, so understanding successful boundary-setting and being able to say no to such requests is a useful tool for peer tutors.

Focusing in on the longitudinal outcomes of peer tutors, Hughes, Gillespie, & Kali (2010) sought out to learn which abilities, values, and skills peer tutors initially develop from their experience and which, if any, they carried over into post-graduate life. The researchers surveyed 126 writing center alumni who graduated from 1982-2007 from three universities in the United States and found that former peer tutors reported that the experience allowed them to gain active listening skills, patience, identification with others, organizational skills and self-confidence that they were able to carry over practically in job interviews and careers as well as into their personal relationships (Hughes et al., 2010). The former tutors also reported that the experience gave them a sense of great responsibility in working with struggling students, allowing them to understand that their actions in a tutoring session had real life consequences and increasing the value placed on learning. Most significantly, the respondents reported viewing tutoring as an

important means of engaging intellectually, emotionally, and socially and rated the importance of their experience in their overall undergraduate development on a Likert scale of 1-5 a mean response of 4.48 (Hughes et al., 2010). These findings illustrate how powerful of a learning experience peer tutoring can be for tutors and how applicable the skills and knowledge potentially gained are in all facets of life.

In contrast to Hughes et al.'s (2010) longitudinal study on tutor outcomes, Micari, Gould, & Lainez (2010) highlighted the power of peer tutoring programs in promoting short-term leadership development for peer tutors. This study examined the effectiveness of a training course in promoting leadership development for peer leaders in a science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) workshop program at a private research university. Peer leaders in this workshop program were responsible for guiding groups of 5-7 students through a challenging worksheet each week, completing a semester long training course, and meeting with the faculty member who created the worksheet to ensure their understanding of the material. To assess the program, Micari et al. (2010) first conducted a qualitative study from 2002-2003 with 166 participants that included open-ended surveys, focus groups, and in-depth interviews with eight facilitators and found that peer leaders felt more confident at the end of the school year than at the beginning in interactions with others, explaining a concept to a group, and their own cognitive abilities.

Second, the researchers used pre- and post-test study to measure the self-perceived leadership development of peer leaders over two years and found that the leaders perceived positive increases in their leadership abilities, particularly in motivating students, managing a group, problem-solving, conflict resolution, and quick-thinking when workshops do not go as planned (Micari et al., 2010). As this longitudinal study and the other studies in this section

illustrate, peer tutoring can be a powerful experience that can have a meaningful impact on the interpersonal, social, and leadership skill development of peer tutors.

Academic Skills and Increased Learning

Researchers in many of the previously mentioned studies have found that in addition to personal and social skill development, peer tutoring experiences contributed to the development of peer tutors' academic skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, understanding of course material, and planning out study time (Arco-Tirado et al., 2011; Gafney & Varma-Nelson, 2007; Loke & Chow, 2007). Hughes et al.'s (2010) previously mentioned study on peer writing tutors also found that the tutors reported that the experience helped them improve analytical skills and writing abilities, as well as to show them the value in cooperative learning. Other researchers' work, particularly Rod Roscoe and Michelene Chi (2007; 2008; 2014) have focused on the increase cognitive and metacognitive learning gained by peer tutors as a result of their tutoring experiences.

Roscoe & Chi (2007) examined the role of two typical tutoring behaviors, examining and questioning, which are believed to help tutors foster their own learning through reflective knowledge-building. They focused on the tutors' monitoring their own comprehension of material, integrating this comprehension with new knowledge, and elaborating on this previous knowledge through tutoring. The researchers reviewed six primary and twelve supplemental studies that included quantitative observations of tutor behavior and objective measures of tutor learning and found that peer tutors most often exhibit a knowledge-telling bias, meaning that they focus more on delivering the knowledge they already have rather than reflecting and building on it, even when trained in knowledge-building strategies (Roscoe & Chi, 2007). Roscoe & Chi (2007) also found that when peer tutors engaged in a dialogue with tutees, rather

than simply lecturing them on the material, they were more likely to engage in knowledge-building strategies, including integrating new and prior knowledge into their explanations and using this integration to form new knowledge and understandings. This particular finding implies that when the peer tutoring process is interactive and dynamic, rather than simply a lecture of the material, it holds the potential for peer tutors, and likely tutees, to gain a deeper understanding of the subject material and go beyond surface-level learning.

Building on their prior study, Roscoe & Chi (2008) conducted an experimental, pretest posttest design study of untrained undergraduates tutoring another student to determine the differences in learning outcomes based on the strategies each group of tutors was instructed to employ. One group of tutors was instructed to explain the material to the tutees beyond what the text said, while another group of tutors were told to explain the text out loud to themselves, and the third group was instructed to create a video explanation of the material, while the remaining ten participants were assigned to the role as tutees (Roscoe & Chi, 2008). Roscoe & Chi (2008) found that the self-explaining condition had the highest gains in deeper learning of the material, while both the self-explaining condition and the peer tutoring condition had similar gains in basic knowledge. The participants in the peer tutoring and tutorial video conditions showed knowledge-telling bias, while the self-explaining condition exhibited the most knowledge-building behaviors (Roscoe & Chi, 2008). Roscoe & Chi (2008) also found that among the participants in the peer tutoring condition, engaging in a dialogue with the tutee through tutee questions helped tutors to move away from knowledge-telling and engage in knowledge-building. Overall the participants who engaged in reflective knowledge-building when tutoring showed the most gains in deeper learning across conditions (Roscoe & Chi, 2008).

Continuing his prior work, Roscoe (2014) explored the self-monitoring hypothesis, which states that tutors engage in knowledge-telling when they have a limited belief in the depth and value of their own understanding and knowledge. Roscoe (2014) hypothesized that the more self-monitoring the tutors engaged in, the more knowledge-building behaviors they would employ, thereby creating deeper learning and metacognitive knowledge. Roscoe (2014) used a pretest posttest study design to study 120 undergraduates from a large, eastern United States research university, the majority of which were psychology students participating for course credit. Participants were selected based on their low knowledge in the subject area studied and two same-gender participants were matched and randomly assigned to the roles of tutor or tutee. While the tutors were not trained on their role, they were given twenty minutes to read and learn the material prior to each session and instructed to cover all of the material and to answer any questions from the tutee.

Roscoe (2014) again found that the tutors displayed a strong knowledge-telling bias, characterized by paraphrasing the material with a few elaborations. Knowledge-building strategies, when employed, were characterized by the tutor more frequently elaborating on the material found in the textbook with his or her own experience, other knowledge on the general subject, and self-reflection on the meaning of the material (Roscoe, 2014). Knowledge-building indicates a deeper understanding and learning of material, as opposed to simply memorizing and reiterating content. In addition, Roscoe (2014) found that tutors who engaged in knowledge-building explanations were more likely to perform well on posttest comprehension questions and tutors were more likely to engage in self-monitoring and knowledge-building when the tutees asked deeper reasoning questions. It is important to note that both of the previously mentioned studies took place in a laboratory setting, somewhat limiting the generalizability of the findings

to real-life settings, however Roscoe's (2014) and Roscoe & Chi's (2008) findings indicate the importance of incorporating knowledge-building strategies into tutor training.

While Backer, Keer, & Valcke (2012) similarly examined the impact of peer tutoring on metacognitive knowledge, their study focused on reciprocal rather than fixed-role peer tutoring programs. The researchers expanded the idea that dialogue between tutor and tutee increase the likelihood of knowledge-building strategies and cognitive knowledge by using a multi-method pretest posttest design to determine how reciprocal peer tutoring impacts metacognition. As a formal component of a 5 credit first year educational sciences course, sixty-seven students were divided into small groups of 4-6 tutees and one tutor and participated in eight ninety-minute tutoring sessions, where the tutor role switched among group members each session (Backer et al., 2012). The participants were also asked to participate in a ninety-minute training session regarding metacognitive strategies, social skills, and the role of a tutor and small-group supervised reflection sessions.

Metacognitive strategies involve students making connections between different points of knowledge, being aware of what they currently know and do not know, understanding how to apply similar knowledge to the current topic, and an awareness of the cognitive processes involved in learning. Metacognitive strategies include properly managing studying and learning, questioning material, evaluating material learned, and reflecting on connections between different topics. Backer et al. (2012) used a questionnaire and observation of the tutoring sessions to assess students' metacognitive knowledge, perceptions of skillfulness, and actual use of strategies and found significant changes in the students' actual metacognitive regulation during tutoring sessions. Backer et al. (2012) also found that the students used more sophisticated and more varied metacognitive strategies on the posttest versus the pretest measure.

However, the researchers found no significant changes in participants' metacognitive knowledge or perceptions of metacognitive skills. Although reciprocal peer tutoring is not the formal model most peer tutoring centers follow, this study highlights that the more peer-to-peer dialogue tutors engage in, the greater the gain in higher-order learning skills.

Difficulties Associated with Peer Tutoring

While more studies have focused on the benefits gained by peer tutors from tutoring experiences, a few research studies have also explored negative tutoring experiences for peer tutors. As in the previously mentioned study above, Loke & Chow (2007) conducted a qualitative study of nursing student peer tutors, and in addition to the personal and social growth associated with peer tutoring, the peer tutors reported several frustrations and challenges involved in peer tutoring, including the tutee's lack of preparation for and participation in the sessions. The peer tutors reported feeling frustrated when the tutees would expect to sit passively while the tutor duplicated the professor's lecture rather than bringing questions or specific topics to discuss. The peer tutors also reported that the time commitment involved in tutoring was a challenge, particularly during busy points in the semester when the tutors had a lot of their own schoolwork to do or when tutees were consistently late to appointments. The tutors also reported feeling at a loss when it was difficult to get through to a tutee due to differences in personalities or learning styles. Finally, the tutors reported feeling frustrated when they believed they did not have enough of an in-depth understanding of the material to truly help (Loke & Chow, 2007).

Micari et al. (2010) also found that peer tutors reported feeling frustrated by the time commitment involved in tutoring in their previously described study of peer leaders in STEM workshops. The tutors reported feeling that the time commitment involved in tutoring sometimes encroached on their own academic pursuits, leading to frustration and a lack of importance

placed on workshop facilitation. Another challenge for the peer leaders in Micari et al.'s (2010) study was that the tutors were unmotivated to participate or put much effort into the workshops if they did not believe the training course requirements were a worthy task that would help them achieve their personal and academic goals. Similarly, another challenge found in the study occurred when the peer leaders were too focused on their own academic goals and applied for the position simply as a resume-builder for job and graduate school applications, leading to less investment in their tutoring experiences (Micari et al., 2010).

Calma's (2013) study, detailed above, illustrated that challenges for peer tutors can also stem from feelings of lack of specific purpose and unclear role characteristics. The peer tutors expressed that more discussion regarding subject-specific tutoring approaches, more case study examples, and hearing strategies from experienced tutors during training could help clarify their purposes and roles as new tutors, combatting this frustration (Calma, 2013). While few studies include findings on peer tutors' difficulties associated with their tutoring experiences, these findings highlight the importance of identifying these frustrations and the factors of tutoring programs that contribute to them in order to improve these programs and maximize the potential outcomes for peer tutors.

As a whole, in addition to the potential positive social, interpersonal, and academic skill development outcomes for peer tutors, the literature shows the necessity in structuring peer tutoring programs with the benefit of both the tutees and the tutors in mind. If peer tutors can benefit positively from these experiences despite the large amount of time peer tutoring entails, it is essential that these programs can be structured to provide the best experience possible for the tutors and to promote the development of academic and social skills. It can be concluded from the literature that when structured well, peer tutoring programs can be a great academic tool for

tutors as well as tutees. Furthermore, the literature shows the necessity in asking peer tutors not only about their tutoring experiences, but also about the role that training, program structure, and the tutor community have played in the overall meaning of their experiences. The dearth of literature in this area also shows the importance in understanding this phenomenon from the peer tutor's perspective.

Project Plan

To better understand the experiences and perceptions of peer tutors, I used a constructivist paradigm to frame my research methodology and data collection. As Mertens (2009) described, constructivists strive to understand how different people construct different realities through interactive data collection between the researcher and participants. The constructivist paradigm is appropriate for my project because I wanted to understand how peer tutors view their experiences and the meaning they gain from them from the points of view of the tutors. Rather than assuming that all peer tutors will view their experience in the same way, I wanted to discover how each individual tutor constructs the meaning and experience of being a peer tutor. Qualitative research methods allowed me to understand from the peer tutors' points of view how each individual constructs their experiences and the salient factors involved in being a peer tutor without imposing any parameters or assumptions about reality in which to force their experiences.

I utilized phenomenology, a type of qualitative research that explores an individual's perceptions of a phenomena they are experiencing, to guide my data collection (Mertens, 2009). Conducting interviews best allowed me to gain an in-depth understanding of peer tutors' feelings, perceptions, behaviors, thoughts, beliefs, and interactions with others. During February 2016, I conducted 25-40 minute interviews with eight peer tutors from the Math Center, Writing

Center, and STEM tutoring program. I asked each peer tutor about the process of becoming a peer tutor, how it felt adjusting to the role, orientation and training procedures, program structure, perceived skill gains, ways being a peer tutor has impacted their college experience, the community of tutors, and the general experience of being a peer tutor at Lotus Blossom College (See Appendix A for full Interview Protocol).

The population that I was interested in learning more about was peer tutors at Lotus Blossom College, a small, private liberal arts college in Massachusetts. These three programs represent the main structured tutoring programs on campus and all operate independently, yet similarly, to recruit, hire, train, orientate, and manage their respective tutors. The Writing Center employs peer tutors to assist students with all aspects of the writing process including grammar, thesis statements and supporting points, paper organization, and citations. The Math Center helps students understand mathematical formulas and concepts at any level, while the STEM tutoring program serves first-year students in the School of Science and Engineering. While the STEM tutoring program was implemented fairly recently, the Math and Writing Centers have been operating for quite some time at the College. It was important to interview a cross-section of tutors from each of the three programs in order to get a complete picture of what it means to be a peer tutor at Lotus Blossom, versus just capturing what it is like to be a peer tutor in one particular program. Although various departments on campus hire one or two peer tutors at their own discretion and based on their yearly funds, those tutors were not included in this project because they are usually not trained or follow the same model of structure, supervision, and peer support typical of the other three peer tutoring programs.

To recruit participants, I first emailed the director of each respective tutoring program to explain my project and asked them for a complete list of their current peer tutors. Once given

these lists in late January, I then emailed all of the peer tutors employed by the Writing Center, Math Center, and STEM tutoring explaining my project and asking for their participation in an interview. I then conducted and transcribed the interviews in February 2016 and performed data analysis in March 2016. Of the eight tutors I interviewed, two were from STEM, two were from the Writing Center, and four were from the Math Center. Three of the participants identified as male, while five identified as female. Finally, four participants were sophomores, one was a junior, and three were seniors.

There was no known physical, legal, or economic harm caused to the peer tutors who chose to participate in my project. I minimized any potential fear of social harm on the part of the participants if they disclosed any negative peer tutoring experiences by conducting the interviews in a private location, keeping the names of my participants private, not disclosing to directors or other tutors who was participating, and not identifying which tutor programs particular participants are involved in. The content of the interviews was kept confidential and was only reported in the context of this project without information identifying participants. Participants were not exposed to any more discomfort or risk of harm than occurs in daily life and all participants were provided with a full explanation of my project, a detailed consent form, and were made aware that they have the right to withdraw consent at any point during the interview process.

Through these interviews, I aimed to better understand the experience of being a peer tutor, how peer tutors make meaning of their experiences, what peer tutors gain from their experiences, and what role, if any, the structure, training, and community of tutors have on these experiences. The overarching goal in this research was to determine what factors make the tutoring experience meaningful for peer tutors and how we can improve these factors and other

aspects of peer tutoring to make the experience more beneficial to peer tutors. To analyze my data, I utilized standard qualitative coding methods detailed by Saldana (2009). I transcribed each interview, then performed line-by-line coding, identifying themes and patterns. The findings and subsequent recommendations below are generated from this coding process and the identified themes and patterns. To member check the accuracy of identified themes and patterns with my participants, I emailed an outline of my findings to all participants in this study asking for any feedback or questions.

Four main findings emerged from the data, discussed in more detail below. The first is the importance in understanding the role of a peer tutor both in general and in the context of the Lotus Blossom community. Second, training and the tutor community are important factors for tutors to understand their role and derive meaning from their experiences. Tutors perceived a number of social, interpersonal, and academic skills outcomes from their experiences and reported peer tutoring as overall positive and rewarding. Finally, participants reported several challenges associated with peer tutoring, including lack of tutee responsibility for learning, tutor frustration when unable to help, and managing boundaries. Before reviewing the findings, there are a few limitations to this study that are important to consider. The first is that a sample size of eight peer tutors is relatively small compared to the total population of approximately 60 peer tutors in all three tutoring programs. Similarly, there was not an even distribution among tutors from each program, with half of the tutors interviewed from one center. Finally, as detailed above, departmental peer tutors were not recruited for this study, so the experiences of peer tutors who are not a part of a formal, structured tutoring program are not represented in the findings.

Findings

After analyzing the data from eight interviews with peer tutors at Lotus Blossom College, four main findings emerged about the experience of being a peer tutor, including what the tutor role means, important factors in providing meaning to this role, benefits and outcomes, and challenges associated with this role. Although each of the three tutor programs operates slightly differently, it is important for the reader to understand some background context on the process of becoming a peer tutor and program structure. All of the participants were nominated by professors to be a peer tutor, typically as freshman or sophomores, and then contacted by the director of each respective tutoring center to apply for the position. In the application and interview process, the prospective tutor's understanding of the role and personality fit with the position was emphasized more than intelligence or technical skills. Both the Math and Writing Centers are open approximately 35 hours a week to all Lotus Blossom students, employ professional as well as peer tutors, and are run by a director. Most tutors work three to four hours a week and are paid minimum wage. In the Math Center alone, the more CRLA (College Reading and Learning Association) certification a tutor has, the more they are paid. Appointments operate on a walk-in basis, can be individual or group, and are tracked and logged by the tutors. The STEM program operates slightly differently, with tutoring available 15 hours a week only to first-year Science & Engineering majors, but with a similar appointment and tracking practice.

The Role of a Peer Tutor

All of the tutors interviewed discussed their perception of their role as a peer tutor at length. They reported that the role of a tutor is to guide and support student learning, enhancing global academic skills and helping students to understand concepts through examples. Rather

than provide a quick answer to a homework problem or surface level understanding, peer tutors work to improve deeper learning and understanding for tutees. As each participant stressed, peer tutors are not teachers and are not there to teach new material or replicate lectures or be used as a homework service. Peer tutors have the unique ability to relate to the students who come in for appointments because they share common experiences of being a student at Lotus Blossom. In this way, peer tutors are able to normalize and understand where tutees are having difficulty. Participants expressed that they are there to serve as ambassadors between tutees and the professors, as well as to help tutees move forward from the spots in which they are having trouble. Tutors also function as supporters and cheerleaders for tutees who are feeling frustrated and defeated because they are struggling to grasp materials or concepts. As Matthew, a sophomore, expressed:

Well, I think it is to support and guide students to solve their own problems, basically. Because the difference between tutoring and teaching, is like teaching, you have the professor teaching it in class, it's like telling you how it is and what to do, but then when you come to us we can try to guide you in that direction that the professor taught you. . . Then we can help you find the tools to solve the problem, basically, and sometimes it's not always being just the smart kid telling you what to do, sometimes it's more being like just a mental support and mentor because sometimes people come in and they have no confidence in themselves.

As Matthew and the other tutors interviewed emphasized, tutors do not work on homework problems with tutees and do not just give answers, instead working on similar problems to help tutees learn concepts and truly understand the material. Tutoring was also viewed as a form of community service and a way to give back to Lotus Blossom. Participants discussed that one of their motivations to tutor is so they can utilize their gifts and intelligence to help other students and the campus as a whole, Lee, a senior, expressed:

Because if we can understand it, then it's hard to see someone else who can't and why should that person fall behind just because they didn't get it immediately? So it's kind of a community service where we're trying to help them out, but it's putting aside your

time and using your skills to help people reach that. Because what's the point of having those skills if you're not going to use it to help someone or to progress something on Earth a little more than it already is.

The participants also discussed the perception of peer tutors on campus and a tutor's role in the greater campus community. Tutors are role models for other students, often known and called upon by professors to set an example for other students in the class. Many tutors interviewed were also involved in other organizations and activities on campus, viewing part of their responsibility as a peer tutor as being a bridge between their many involvements. Participants explained that through their interactions with friends and other peers both in and out of their tutor role, they wanted to help show students the value of peer tutors and tutor centers, normalizing tutoring. Many participants expressed that they viewed tutors as campus leaders, although they believe that the general campus perception is that tutoring is a form of on-campus employment. Melanie, a senior, stated:

. . . I'm on the cross-country and track teams, so like the girls, I've been able to help them out a lot because if they're struggling they'll be like, "oh Melanie's a tutor" and they'll be like, "oh really? can you help me?" . . . professors are really comfortable with you. They often ask in class at the beginning of the semester, "make sure you go to the Writing Center- by the way is anyone a tutor in here?" raise your hand, "Oh great, go to her" type thing. So there is kind of like a leadership and with the growing popularity of both centers, Math and Writing, everyone's more aware of what's going on and the professors especially look to the tutors and see the benefit they can bring in reaching students that they might not be able to. . .

As Melanie's comment affirms, peer tutors view increasing campus visibility of tutoring services as a part of their role. In many ways, peer tutors are seen as academic leaders and role models for other students, serving as ambassadors between professors and tutees.

Important Factors in Meaning-Making of the Tutor Role

Participants also spoke about the transition into being a peer tutor and the factors that helped them understand and grow into this role. Peer tutors reported feeling nervous and unsure

of themselves or their role during their initial weeks as a tutor. Experience tutoring, mentors, and trainings helped to aid tutors in this transition into their new role. Participants expressed that the more tutoring they did, the more confident of themselves and their role they felt. Tutors also stated that having official and unofficial tutor mentors was a valuable resource in this transition period. Similarly, Rae & Baillie (2005) found that new tutors enjoyed having experienced tutors to rely on for questions and guidance as they navigated their new role. In one tutoring program, new tutors are officially matched with a veteran tutor during pre-semester trainings, so that the new tutor has a designated person to go to with questions and concerns. As Bianca, a sophomore, explained:

I think a part of it was experience and a part of it was my mentor. She mostly showed me like how to tutor in the beginning, so then like I saw what she did and where she went to if like they needed a calculator, she like showed me, "okay follow me, just like refresh your memory." So I think it was mostly her that helped me kind of get in my groove, figure out what and what not to do.

Some tutors immediately felt a bond with their mentor, while others expressed that there was not enough built in opportunities for them to connect and instead relied on unofficial mentors in their program. Other tutors went to friends who were experienced tutors, but all tutors expressed that they felt comfortable asking any other tutor or professional staff person for assistance when needed.

A few tutors also expressed that reflection on how tutorials went and discussions surrounding their role and common tutoring experiences helped them to make meaning of their tutor roles and grow in confidence. Rae & Baillie (2005) also found that reflective discussions on the tutor role are important factors for peer tutors in developing meaning in their experiences and confidence in their abilities. As Kailey, a junior, expressed:

Probably when that first person I tutored left, I kind of reflected like okay what could I do better next time? So like the more people I tutored the easier it got because it helped me realize what techniques work and what doesn't work.

As Kailey's comment indicated, self-reflection on tutorials is an important means of understanding best practices in connecting with and ultimately helping different tutees.

Discussions with fellow tutors and directors were also an opportunity to reflect on what did and did not go well during the tutorial, as well as brainstorm ways to utilize theory to approach different situations. In two of the programs, reflective writing during trainings or at the end of the year is also utilized for tutors to think about how they have grown as a tutor and their varied experiences.

Trainings tend to be on-going and serve an important role in tutors' understanding of what it means to be a peer tutor. While each center structures the timeline of training slightly differently, the content of these trainings similarly stress what a peer tutor is and isn't, provide opportunities for discussion, and feature activities to practice of a variety of tutoring scenarios. The tutors' perspective on training supports Calma's (2013) study, which also found that trainings that focus on characteristics of a good tutor, how to conduct a tutorial, and tutoring practice are perceived to be most beneficial by peer tutors. Participants expressed that they found training very helpful in understanding the boundaries of their roles, technical skills in approaching tutorials and different content, and how to apply tutoring theory into practice. Trainings and other tutor meetings also provide a forum for discussion about tutor experiences and communication from the director, professors, and fellow tutors about relevant concerns. As Vanessa, a sophomore, expressed,

So basically what we did was we had the two-credit course once a week and each week kind of had a different theme, either like discussing kind of different writing styles from different ethnicities and cultures across the world or talking about you know students with learning disabilities, or talking about kind of just like the transition from high school

writing to college writing, all of those different things. . .we also did like mock tutorials with the other people in the class which was really nice because we got kind of got a chance to try out different conversations things with other people before we tried them in our tutorials. . . it was really nice to kind of read a little bit about the history of writing centers. . . and that was really interesting just to kind of understand our role like on the college campus and what exactly like my job kind of was, so that really helped shape my understanding of what I'm doing as a writing consultant.

Participants in this study uniformly reported that the community of peer tutors, staff, and professional tutors is a positive and helpful support system for tutors, beginning from their first few weeks as a new tutor. Participants expressed feeling a sense of security from knowing that they are a part of a community of tutors that they are confident they can rely on always, whether it's for help in a tutorial or a personal issue. This community is created intentionally by each center through ice-breakers and team-building activities during trainings and planning tutor social events. As Loke & Chow (2007) found in their study, peer tutors report benefiting from the social connections that stem from being a part of a tutor community. Bianca affirmed this finding, stating:

I just think it's a really rewarding experience, just especially seeing the students excel and then also for yourself there's a community I go to I know I can get help if I need it and I know that they're there for me even with non-math issues, that we're a community and we help each other always. So I think, just a really good outcome from being a peer tutor.

The peer tutors interviewed in this study expressed that being a part of this community has enabled them to feel supported and confident in their role, respect and value the diversity of their fellow tutors, and expand their social circle.

Rewards and Outcomes of Tutoring

All participants found tutoring to be a generally positive and rewarding experience, expressing happiness in their role. One of the most common rewarding experiences of being a peer tutor that was discussed was the “aha” moment during a tutorial, when a tutee fully understood a concept and is engaged in their own learning. This moment signifies a transition

from frustration and negativity to true, real understanding and success. As Tara, a senior, stated, this is a rare moment:

Well, we don't get that [satisfaction] every time we tutor. Quite often the student will just be trying to get through and nothing will click by the time you're done. . . or a student just doesn't have their whole understanding solved, they're just like "okay, so I follow these steps to do this thing and that's gotten me my homework grades" but they don't really think about it too deeply. So when you do have a student who actually goes, "I didn't get it before, but I get it now" then that means they've gone from one state to another where they're doing math in their head. Not like mental math, but they're thinking about "this leads to that, leads to that". . .

Another rewarding experience discussed by most participants was when a tutee expresses gratitude for the tutor's help. These moments are rewarding because they illustrate to the tutor that they are fulfilling their role successfully and helping a student succeed. As Hughes et al. (2010) also found, peer tutors perceive a sense of responsibility in their work with students and understand their impact on student learning. As Jason, a sophomore, stated:

...So there was this girl last year towards the end of the year and she hadn't been doing well on her tests. But she had started coming in for my shifts so after tutoring her for a few days in a row, she had her final Math test and she came up to me after that test and was like so grateful because she had gotten like a 90 or an 86 or something like that on it. And she was like, "oh my god thank you," and I was just like wow, I actually made a difference in this girl's academic experience. So that was cool. I thought that was a good moment for myself, that made me happy.

Peer tutoring was believed to have had a positive impact on the participants' college experience thus far, particularly in terms of social connections across campus. Most participants expressed that being a peer tutor has allowed them more opportunities to meet more students, staff, and faculty than they would have otherwise. This connection to different campus stakeholders and peers enables participants to feel more integrated in the campus community. Additionally, all but one participant expressed that peer tutoring had impacted their social skills. As Loke & Chow (2007) found, peer tutors reported tutoring to be an positive experience that impacted their communication and empathy skills. Micari et al. (2010) also found that after

experience tutoring, tutors felt more confident in their interactions with others and their personal cognitive abilities. Participants believed tutoring had an effect on skills such as communication, empathy, active listening, self-confidence, open-mindedness, and leadership development. As

Lee explained:

Definitely communication, that's so key with tutoring. So I was pretty shy before tutoring, I wasn't like super out-going, but that's definitely something I've developed and it's super important to tutoring. Putting aside personal biases, because you find people from literally every background who come in, so whether that's because they're an older student, whether that's because they come from a different country, don't necessarily speak our language, have a different religion. Like no matter what it is, like you have to put aside a bias. . . Then, I guess this goes with communication kind of, but being able to ask questions instead of talking, so kind of like listening and asking questions. Because tutoring isn't really telling people, it's just asking them the right questions.

This statement reflects Hughes et al.'s (2010) finding that peer tutoring improves tutors interpersonal skills, including active listening, identification with others, and self-confidence.

Finally, participants identified opportunities for further leadership development as a peer tutor, including formally or informally mentoring new tutors, assisting the director in trainings or center operations, serving as an embedded tutor for a course, presenting at conferences, or piloting new initiatives to improve their respective centers. As Vanessa explained, being a peer tutor offers “almost like make your own leadership role, kind of like, ‘what can I do with this position to make it more meaningful for myself?’”

Finally, all participants emphasized that being a peer tutor had a positive impact on their academic skills and behaviors. These academic skills include deeper understanding of subject material, exposure to different concepts in one's tutor subject, more involved personal academic behaviors and planning, and constant review of basic subject concepts. This finding reflects the research of Arco-Tirado et al. (2011) and Gafney & Varma-Nelson (2007); each respective study

found that tutoring experiences contribute to the development of problem-solving, understanding of course material, and planning out study time. As Vanessa stated,

I definitely think that my personal writing has gotten better because not that I didn't self-critique my writing before, but I'm doing it even more now I think. And having to like do time management too, like now that I'm having a job on campus and all of that I'm like, "okay, well I have this assignment due on Thursday, so maybe I'll write a rough draft over the weekend and then I'll check back with it, on you know Monday and Wednesday." And so now I kind of have this whole really long extended writing process, which I didn't necessarily have before. And I think it's been really beneficial for me because I see my writing in a whole new light every time I read it, and so I'm really refining it every time that I look at it, and so it's just getting even better than it was previously.

Vanessa's statement reflects Hughes et. al.'s (2010) finding that tutoring experiences were perceived to enhance personal analytical and writing skills. Peer tutors were able to take the deeper learning strategies and techniques utilized in tutorial sessions and transfer them to their own academic behaviors. Each participant also expressed feeling more confident in their understanding of their respective tutor subject due to constant review of material, either through tutorials or through trainings and other exercises designed to keep tutor technical skills sharp.

Challenges associated with Tutoring

Although overwhelmingly positive, peer tutoring has several challenges, such as when students are not prepared for or engaged in their tutoring sessions and expect the tutor to just give them the answers. Lack of tutee responsibility for personal learning was identified as the main source of frustration for peer tutors. Participants expressed frustration and difficulty navigating a tutorial when a student comes in wanting easy answers without putting in the legwork. Vanessa explains:

I think it's a little bit difficult when students come in with absolutely nothing done. . . And they come to you assuming you're going to be able to tell them what to do for the assignment . . . And so then you almost feel a little bit of pressure, like you want to help them so bad. . . but you also know that that's not really your job and that you kind of want to make sure that they understand exactly what your job is and what your place is. And

that they need to take a little bit of the responsibility, go talk to the professor, figure that out. And then once they're ready to start, start an outline, or like have like a first draft or something like that, then they can come back and you're more than willing to help them out. But I think like sometimes it's really difficult to kind of, draw the line when the student comes in like completely unprepared.

Loke & Chow (2007) also found that peer tutors reported tutee lack of preparation and participation as a negative, frustrating aspect of peer tutoring. Another challenge can occur when peer tutors are unable to help the student or are not sure of the answer. While peer tutors are knowledgeable in their respective subjects, they are not experts, and sometimes they may be unsure how to approach a problem or assignment. This finding also reflects Loke & Chow's (2007) previous finding that tutors can feel lost when they feel as though they do not have enough subject knowledge. Participants reported feeling frustrated when this occurs, feeling as though they are not doing their job. Matthew expressed:

. . . I think it is because you always want to be able to help the student and sometimes if you can't really help the student, like it's not always fun to maybe call someone else over. Because you want to be able to help them by yourself, but then that's part of the math center team. That we should all be able to help each other.

Participants explained that they are able to manage these challenges by reminding themselves of the parameters of their role as tutors and relying on their tutor community for help and support. Peer tutors also must remind themselves that although they can help students be successful, they are not solely responsible for tutee's success or failure.

Managing boundaries with students who come in for tutoring is a significant challenge for peer tutors and requires them to develop skills in boundary-setting and assertiveness. This challenge can occur when students have misperceptions about what the role of a peer tutor is and become frustrated when expectations do not meet reality. Participants expressed the importance of communicating and setting boundaries of the tutor role with tutees, such as explaining that they cannot work directly on homework problems or give answers, but that they can review

similar problems and guide students through concepts. Being firm and clear in these boundaries is important, both because tutees may try to pressure the tutor into bending the rules and because when a tutor perceives that they are not getting through to a student, it can be tempting to just give the answer in frustration. As Jason stated:

When you're tutoring, if a student's not getting where you're coming from it's frustrating to the tutor and to the student. So the natural reaction is to want to just be like, alright this is it, this is the answer, because you know the answer and the student doesn't. So trying to take your time and make sure that they understand how you're getting there can be frustrating sometimes if they don't understand it, so the natural reaction is to just say, "alright, this is it." So you've got to make sure that you're not doing that, so you've got to make sure you're really taking your time to slowly go through it. And if the student is like this one particular student last semester, where they're clearly not trying to understand it, you've got to realize that and it's their own fault. If they're not going to try to understand it, then you can't just tell them the answer.

As Jason identified in his comment, it is essential for peer tutors to understand the parameters of the tutor role and managing their feelings of responsibility for tutee success. Jason was able to stand firm in his boundary of not just giving the student the answer by reminding himself of what his role is and the tutee's responsibility for his own learning and success. This reflects Arco-Tirado et al.'s (2011) finding that peer tutors showed significant gains in skills such as ability to say no and cutting off interactions that are necessary in managing boundaries with tutees.

Overall, these findings highlight peer tutors' understanding of their role as a peer tutor and what that role means in the greater campus community. Understanding the characteristics and parameters of this role are essential to students feeling prepared to be peer tutors, and trainings are an important factor in developing this understanding. The data also shows that peer tutoring is an overwhelmingly positive, rewarding experience which has potential social, interpersonal, and academic skills outcomes. Finally, although tutoring is a positive experience, there are challenges that stem from tutees misperceiving the tutor's role or pushing the limits of its

boundaries. Learning how to manage boundaries with tutees, especially friends, and be firm is an essential skill that tutors must develop in order to be successful and satisfied in this role.

Managing boundaries and having self-confidence in this role are related to a tutor's understanding of this role and its characteristics, as well as the amount of support and guidance a tutor receives. The findings of this study provide important insights regarding which factors produce the most meaningful experiences for peer tutors and the conditions that best support the development of important skills for these students. Incorporating both these findings and the literature reviewed earlier in this study, recommendations for best practices designed to enhance the experiences of peer tutors and maximize the potential benefit for these students are discussed below.

Recommendations

Both the literature reviewed and the data collected from the eight peer tutors interviewed in this study provide valuable insights into how peer tutors make meaning of their experiences. The data revealed tutors' perceptions of what it means to be a peer tutor at Lotus Blossom and the tutor role, important factors in meaning-making, rewards and benefits of tutoring, and challenges associated with peer tutoring. As it was the initial goal of this study to better understand the experiences of peer tutors and what makes these experiences meaningful in order to maximize the potential benefits for tutors, in this section, I provide recommendations for improving practice in peer tutor programs. These recommendations include creating a Peer Tutor Coordinator position to support departmental peer tutors on campus, creating and structuring a centralized tutoring program for departmental peer tutors, implementing mentoring programs between veteran and new peer tutors, and increasing campus visibility of tutoring through collaborations with the Office of Student Involvement.

Recommendation 1: Lotus Blossom should create a Peer Tutor Coordinator position to provide training, support, and oversight to departmental peer tutors on campus.

While this study focused on the three structured peer tutoring programs on campus, there are a handful of other peer tutors at Lotus Blossom recruited and hired for specific departments on campus. Typically, it is up to the department's discretion to hire one or two peer tutors, based on perceived student needs, department funds, and desirability of utilizing peer tutoring. As the data from this study highlight, thorough training and a support system of peer tutors and professional staff are important factors for peer tutors to understand, feel confident, and feel supported in their tutor role. Respondents expressed their gratitude for the presence and support of the director and other professional staff in their tutoring program, feeling comfortable going to them with questions or concerns. Tutors in this study also reported that having a community of tutors as a resource for questions, guidance, and support was invaluable to their experience. Similarly, Loke & Chow (2007) found that tutors benefit from the social connections they gain from being a part of the tutor community. As a result, all peer tutors on campus should be given the opportunity to benefit in this way through more consistent, coordinated support and the opportunity to be a part of a tutor community.

To ensure consistency in support across tutors, provide and form a community, and alleviate any extra responsibility to academic departments, this recommendation should be accomplished by the creation of a Peer Tutor Coordinator position. This position could be placed in an office focused on academic success, reporting to the Director, so the funding for hiring, training, and supporting tutors could instead come from a neutral source. This allows every department across campus to have the option to nominate tutors, despite the status of their

budget. This full time professional would be responsible for hiring, training, supporting, and managing all the departmental peer tutors on campus. This professional would collaborate with the academic departments who choose to nominate tutors for content-specific trainings about the nuances of tutoring Biology versus Philosophy, as well as maintain open lines of communication throughout the semester regarding take-home tests and other assignments expectations of which professors may want tutors to be aware. This professional would also coordinate tutoring hours, creating a schedule and communicating that schedule to the greater campus community.

Departmental tutors could also be asked to log and track all student appointments, utilizing spreadsheets or a program already employed by the Math Center, Writing Center, or STEM tutoring. These reports would be reviewed by the Peer Tutor Coordinator, as well as sent to professors who wish to see them. This professional would hold pre-semester trainings and monthly group meetings with the departmental tutors, as well as be available to meet one-on-one with the tutors to discuss any questions, problems, or concerns. This model will help departmental tutors form a community of support and encouragement and feel more secure in their tutor role. Structuring departmental tutoring like this will also help hours be more organized and accessible, potentially increasing student utilization of these services and tutors' sense of purpose in their role.

This professional would need to be knowledgeable and experienced in the practices of peer tutoring and could become a member of an established tutoring association, such as the College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA), utilizing their standards and curriculum for training. The CRLA publishes materials to help tutor program coordinators utilize best practices to structure programs and trainings for peer tutors across disciplines. The Peer Tutor Coordinator would also need to work well with faculty and academic departments across campus, ensuring

that there are no misunderstandings between the two entities, as well as collaborating with departments to market and advertise tutoring services. While this person would report directly to the Director of the Center for Academic Enrichment at Lotus Blossom, the departmental tutors could continue to utilize spaces within their academic departments to hold their hours. This will keep the tutors connected to and in communication with the professors whose courses they are tutoring.

This position's work could be evaluated by tracking the number and content of appointments with departmental tutors, measuring how much student utilization of services has increased. Tutees could also be asked to take a brief survey at the end of their tutoring session, rating how they felt the session went. The departmental tutors could also be asked for feedback, in the form of a focus group or survey at the end of the semester, whether they feel supported in their role, the potential presence of a tutor community, and what factors make their tutor experience meaningful. The responsibilities of this role could emulate established Peer Tutor Coordinator positions at other institutions, such as Worcester State University and Bryant University. At Bryant University, there is a separate coordinator for Writing Center tutors and content peer tutors ("Academic Success Programs," 2016). Worcester State University recently added a Peer Tutor Coordinator position to their Academic Success Center, which among serving as a walk-in advisor, is also responsible for consulting with departmental faculty to recruit, hire, and coordinate peer tutoring schedules. This position at Worcester State is similarly responsible for training, supporting, and overseeing the training content of peer tutors ("Staff Associate Academic Advisor/Tutor Coordinator," 2016).

Recommendation #2: All departmental peer tutors should receive intensive training and thorough support throughout the academic year.

The peer tutors in this study also reported that the on-going, thorough training they received was an important factor in their sense of understanding and security in their tutor role. Respondents also expressed that their sense of reward from the tutor experience and the academic and social skills they gained stemmed in part from their trainings. Calma (2013) also found that tutors perceived trainings to be beneficial, especially ones that cover how to conduct a tutorial, characteristics of a good tutor, and best practices in tutoring. Training all departmental peer tutors will enable them to be more effective tutors, and therefore the experience will be more beneficial to the tutors and tutees alike. Utilizing the same content on the role of a tutor, do's and don'ts, and best practices in peer tutoring also serves the dual purpose of ensuring the students who seek out tutoring receive a consistent message about what tutoring is and is not. As the respondents in this study identified, it is easy for the line between tutor and teacher to blur, particularly before tutor training and when tutees may push for tutors to just give them the answers. Training will enable departmental tutors to understand their role and utilize best practices in sessions, therefore guiding their tutees towards deeper learning and understanding of course material.

As stated in the first recommendation above, the Peer Tutor Coordinator will be responsible for the departmental tutors program. Students who are recruited to tutor content subjects outside of the parameters of the Math Center, Writing Center, and STEM program, such as Philosophy, Criminology, or Accounting, will be served by this program. The learning outcomes of this program would be for departmental peer tutors to understand their tutor role, feel confident in their tutor abilities, and feel supported in this work. For students nominated to

be tutors, this program will begin with their application and continue throughout their tenure as a departmental tutor. Similar to the practices of the established tutoring programs on campus, professors could choose to nominate students who they believe would make good subject tutors for their department. The Peer Tutor Coordinator would then be responsible for reaching out to these students to gauge their interest, invite them to apply, and interview candidates they believe will be a good fit for the tutoring role. Once selected, all tutors would attend a two-day tutor training session before the beginning of the Fall semester and an additional one-day training before the beginning of the Spring semester. Trainings would be based on CRLA standards and certifications, covering content such as the role of a peer tutor, what a tutor is and is not, the characteristics of a good tutor, strategies for tutoring sessions, and how to handle a wide range of student types and concerns (“CRLA-College Reading and Learning Association,” 2015). The CRLA handbook also includes tips for program structure and suggestions for team-building activities to help facilitate the development of a tutor community. The tutor trainings would also consist of the technicalities of tutoring the different disciplines, with different faculty leading sessions for similar content tutors, and team-building activities. New tutors would be required to attend an additional session during the fall and spring trainings that orients them to the role of a tutor and perhaps feature a panel of veteran tutors sharing their experiences.

After a year of this program, the Peer Tutor Coordinator could select one veteran tutor from each school to serve as a head tutor, assisting them with training, overseeing the tutors, and acting as a resource for new tutors. The role of the head tutors, similar to the Peer Tutor Cabinet mentioned in the data, would be to act as a liaison between the tutors and the Coordinator, serve as an extra resource and mentor to new tutors, and to assist the Coordinator with facilitating trainings and other social events. Peer tutors would be paid minimum wage and asked to work 4-8 hours a

week, depending on availability. The Peer Tutor Coordinator would work to ensure that there were at least two tutors on each shift; to accomplish this in lieu of only one tutor per department, tutors in the same school could be paired together. For instance, Political Science and Psychology tutors could tutor in a shared space in the School of Liberal Arts. During the day and in the evenings throughout the first few weeks of each semester, the Peer Tutor Coordinator could periodically visit tutors during their shifts and ensure everything was running smoothly.

Throughout the semester, all tutors would meet together for monthly staff meetings where they can bond, continue training, hear updates from the Coordinator, and possibly meet with faculty regarding different assignment expectations. At the end of each semester, the departmental tutoring program could have a party with food, team-building, and awarding of CRLA certifications and other awards for tutors. To assess the success of this program, new tutors could be asked to complete a questionnaire before starting tutor training and again at the end of their first semester about the role and characteristics of a good tutor and other training content. As Rae & Baillie (2005) found, reflective discussion is an important factor for making meaning of the peer tutor experience and building tutor self-confidence in their new role. Similar to the reflective papers the Math Center tutors write at the end of each semester, tutors in this program could also be asked to write a reflection on their tutor experience and how they've grown, and meet individually with the Coordinator to discuss them.

Recommendation 3: Each tutor program should implement a mentoring program, pairing veteran and new tutors.

Respondents in this study discussed the value of having senior tutors available to guide them along the process of transitioning into their role as peer tutors. For most respondents, this person was an unofficial mentor and friend, but one tutoring program does have a structured

mentoring component in place. While respondents in this study appreciated having a mentor, they indicated that after training, there was little structure in place to help them bond with their mentor and develop a relationship. Those tutors who did connect with their official mentor expressed how helpful and influential this person was in their first few weeks as a tutor.

Similarly, Rae & Baillie (2005) found that the new tutors in their study believed having head tutors available as a resource for questions and guidance was important to their transition into the role. For these reasons, Lotus Blossom should enhance the unofficial use of mentors in peer tutoring programs by establishing a structured, consistent mentor system between experienced and new tutors. For the program with an already established mentor system, adding more opportunities throughout the semester for mentor and mentee pairs to interact will enhance the already beneficial practice. Other programs can build this practice into their programs to help provide new tutors with a firm anchor in the tutoring center and provide senior tutors with another opportunity to develop important interpersonal and leadership skills. While the process of new tutors finding unofficial mentors and being able to turn to any tutor for help is valuable and should continue, adding more structure to a mentoring system will provide every tutor the opportunity to have a designated person to go to with questions, concerns, or simply to share experiences and build connections. It will also enable the shy tutors to still receive guidance by placing the responsibility for initiating contact on the more experienced mentor.

Modeled after Providence College's Tutor Mentor Program in the institution's Office of Academic Services, this program would be coordinated by the director of each respective program, who would be responsible for recruiting interested veteran tutors, sending a survey to all participating tutors, and then matching the participating veteran tutors with new tutors based on commonalities and interests. The structure, implementation, and effectiveness of Providence

College's program was discussed during a presentation by the Assistant Director for Tutorial Services, Sr. Carolyn Sullivan, at a recent New England Peer Tutoring Association (NEPTA) conference. Veteran tutors apply to serve as mentors and are asked to attend an additional half-hour of tutor training during the summer and meet with their mentee three times before the end of September, at checkpoints after training, the new tutor's first appointment, and at the end of the month. After these three meetings, mentors and mentees can still meet informally, but the formal meeting requirements are fulfilled. At the end of the semester, Sr. Carolyn meets with the new tutors who participated in the program and asks for feedback.

The program at Lotus Blossom would be designed to serve all participating tutors by helping new tutors transition into their role and provide another opportunity for professional development for veteran tutors. The tutor mentor program would last for one semester, though pairs would be encouraged to continue to meet informally after the program ends. The learning outcomes of this program are for new tutors to feel supported in their role transition, to form bonds between new and veteran tutors, for new tutors to have a thorough understanding of their tutor role, for new tutors to feel confident in this role, and to enhance personal development for all participating tutors. Tutor mentors would be asked to attend an additional session training session explaining program expectations, how to be an effective mentor, and the goals of the program. Tutoring program budgets would be adjusted to allow for participants to be paid for these additional hours.

During pre-semester training or the first week of the semester, all tutors in the program would socialize for an hour over refreshments, meet their mentors, and exchange contact information. In addition to sharing an hour of tutoring together, mentors and mentees would be asked to meet up socially three times during the new tutor's initial semester to discuss how the

semester is going so far for the new tutor. Similar to Providence College's model, tutor mentors would be provided with guiding questions to help them facilitate discussions with their mentees. However, differing from Providence's model, this program would be structured to last the duration of the new tutor's first semester, focusing on the initial transition into the role as well as the new tutors' growth throughout their first semester. The first meeting would occur during the first few weeks of the semester and the conversation would revolve around additional training questions and new tutor fears and expectations. The second meeting would take place by the midterm point of the semester, with the discussion including how the new tutor's appointments have been going, any concerns, and how prepared they feel going into each appointment. The third meeting would take place during the last few weeks of the semester and would include a reflection on what did and did not go well during the new tutor's appointments, how their skills have evolved as a tutor, and helping them to identify their strengths and areas of growth in tutoring.

As in Providence's model, the tutor mentors would be asked to write up a short report after each meeting and email it to the director so they can ensure that all pairs are meeting and track conversations for consistent questions or concerns across new tutors. This practice will also allow the director to understand which aspects of training need more attention the following semester. Also differing from Providence's program, at the end of the semester, mentors and mentees would be asked to write a short reflection paper about their experiences in the program and how they feel it's impacted their tutor experience, as well as meet one-on-one with the director. Rae & Baillie's (2005) finding on the importance of reflective discussions in tutor role transition and meaning-making is also applicable to this recommendation. Not only will this practice help all tutors process and make meaning of their experiences, but it will also help to

assess the effectiveness of the program and if the intended learning outcomes are being achieved.

Recommendation #4: Increase visibility and understanding of tutoring on campus through collaborations with the Office of Student Engagement during Orientation and First Year Experience.

As Loke & Chow (2007) found and the data in this study supported, peer tutors feel frustrated when tutees come to sessions unprepared and unwilling to actively participate. Many of the challenges with peer tutoring that respondents discussed stemmed from tutee's lack of understanding of the tutor role, believing peer tutors to be more of a homework service than a guide. The tutors in this study also indicated that first-time tutees often feel nervous coming to tutoring because of the perceived remedial stigma of tutor services. Increasing visibility across campus through collaboration with the Orientation and First Year Experience programs, housed under the Office of Student Engagement (OSE), will help lessen this sense of stigma, improve student understanding of tutoring services, and therefore reduce some challenges of tutoring. Forming connections between tutors and other peers and staff on campus will also enhance the positive impact tutoring has on tutors' college experience by giving them more opportunities for expanding their social circle and integrating in the campus community. Finally, these opportunities will also further increase tutors' communication, interpersonal, and leadership skills, enabling peer tutors to be viewed in more of a leadership role on campus. As the tutors in this study explained, while many of them viewed their role as a type of campus leader, the outside campus perception is that peer tutoring is a job. By partnering with New Student Orientation and First Year Experience (FYE), peer tutors can begin to be viewed as student

leaders integral to the overall campus community and not simply siloed in academics, tutoring for pay.

The directors of each respective tutor program and the Orientation and FYE staff will work together to coordinate and oversee this collaboration. Incoming first-year students would be served by this initiative, with the goal to help new students feel more comfortable, prepared, and knowledgeable about what to expect with peer tutoring and the peer tutor role. Tutors could be asked to participate on a volunteer basis to bolster their leadership experience and campus involvement. June New Student Orientation would feature a panel of peer tutors from the different programs on campus explaining their role, discussing their other involvements on campus, and dispelling stereotypes about tutoring. This practice can help make the tutors seem more approachable and human, as well as helping to reduce incoming students' perceptions of tutoring as a remedial, embarrassing service purely for struggling students. This partnership could be continued during the First Year Experience course, where tutors from each program would lead one week's session, speaking to first-years about their experiences as tutors, the expectations for tutoring sessions, and dispel common tutoring myths. Tutors can also apply to be Peer Mentors in First Year Experience courses, taking on additional leadership opportunities and continuing to make connections between academic and student life offices. This continuation provides another avenue to help these students feel more comfortable utilizing tutoring for the first time, as well as help improve student understanding of tutoring services.

This collaboration can be assessed by surveying first-year students about their knowledge, perceptions, and potential utilization of tutoring programs before June Orientation, after June Orientation, and then again at the end of their First Year Experience course. Feedback from peer tutors about their experiences tutoring first-year students and their perception of the

tutee's understanding of their tutor role can also help administrators assess its effectiveness. Tutoring and other academic resources are already part of the content of Orientation and First Year Experience, and it is possible that there are already Orientation Leaders or Peer Mentors who also happen to be tutors, bringing about awareness of tutoring to first-year students. Creating a more structured and involved collaboration enhances these informal connections, helps to dispel the myth of tutoring as remedial, and enables tutors and their leadership to become more visible in the broader campus community.

This study highlighted that peer tutors in the Math Center, Writing Center, and STEM program find their experiences to be positive, meaningful, and impactful on their college experiences and skill development. Trainings and a consistent support system enable tutors to understand their role, learn how to be an effective tutor, and benefit from the experience. Given this, it is important to highlight ways in which we can improve practice to continue to benefit peer tutors in these programs and extend these benefits to all peer tutors on campus. Based on the literature and data in this study, to improve peer tutoring practices I recommended to create a Peer Tutor Coordinator position to support departmental peer tutors on campus, create and structure a centralized tutoring program for departmental peer tutors, implement mentoring programs between veteran and new peer tutors, and increase campus visibility and understanding of tutoring through collaborations with the Office of Student Involvement. By implementing these measures, peer tutors can continue to develop personally, professionally, and academically through their role and truly gain something meaningful from their experience. Peer tutoring is an important practice that helps both struggling students and high-achieving students learn, develop, and grow and more attention should be given in future research to how peer tutoring impacts the tutors themselves. The four recommendations detailed above were the most salient that

materialized from the data and literature combined, but there are certainly more that could be discussed to improve practices in peer tutoring. The overarching thread in all of these recommendations and all best practices in tutoring is that equipped with a thorough understanding of the tutor role and the support of experienced peers and staff, peer tutors will be able to positively impact their tutees and make a difference in their campus community.

Conclusion

The impact of tutoring programs on peer tutors is an understudied phenomenon in higher education that can have important outcomes for institutions' brightest students. The purpose of this research study was to better understand the experiences of peer tutors, the impact of these experiences on tutors' personal and academic skills development, and how training and program structure impact these experiences. This topic is important to investigate because by better understanding what makes peer tutoring meaningful for tutors, tutoring programs will then be able to implement and enhance these important factors into their programs, thereby increasing the potential benefits and outcomes for tutors. The literature reviewed in this study found that peer tutors can gain communication, interpersonal, leadership, academic, and metacognitive skills from their experiences (Gaffney & Varma-Nelson, 2007; Loke & Chow, 2007; Micari et al., 2010; Roscoe & Chi 2007, 2008; Roscoe, 2014). Researchers have also demonstrated the important role that training, program structure, and a peer community can play in peer tutors understanding, development, and orientation into their roles as peer tutors (Calma, 2013; Rae & Baillie, 2005).

This qualitative study of eight peer tutors at Lotus Blossom College from the Writing Center, the Math Center, and STEM tutoring support previous researchers' findings on the benefits and outcomes of peer tutors, while also providing insight into the role of a peer tutor and

how the meaning of this role is constructed. Through the data collected in this study, I believe that valuable information was gleaned to understand and begin to answer the original research questions of: how do peer tutors make meaning of their experiences? Does being a peer tutor impact students' personal, academic, and leadership development, and does the amount of training a peer tutor receives have any impact on this development? This study's findings, particularly about the role of a peer tutor and the rewards of peer tutoring, illustrate how meaningful, valuable, and engaging the tutor experience is for undergraduate peer tutors at Lotus Blossom College. The findings in this study highlight that trainings, tutor mentors, reflection on the tutor experience, and the support system of the tutor community are all important factors in constructing a meaningful tutor experience. Peer tutoring was found to greatly impact participants' communication and interpersonal skills, self-confidence, and depth and breadth of academic capabilities, suggesting that tutoring is a worthwhile, developmental, and enjoyable undertaking. While tutoring is not without its challenges, a strong training foundation, the community of tutors, and a thorough understanding of the tutor role work together to help mitigate these frustrations and enable tutors to navigate these issues.

The findings from this research study have several implications for peer tutoring at Lotus Blossom College, peer tutoring in general, and the future of higher education in the United States. As detailed in the recommendations for improving practice above, these findings and the literature examined illustrate several ways to implement or enhance programs to better serve peer tutors. If an understanding of the tutor role, sense of community, and strong trainings enable tutors in the three formal tutoring programs at Lotus Blossom to gain meaning, skills, and growth from their experiences, these same factors should be implemented for departmental peer tutors to benefit in the same way. Similarly, the impact of tutor mentoring and tutor visibility on campus

should be enhanced through more formal program structure and collaboration with other offices on campus. Based on the relative lack of literature focusing on the experiences of peer tutors and the wealth of information gained from the peer tutors interviewed in this study, the importance of further research and continued emphasis on this topic is apparent. More research is necessary to continue to understand how diverse program structures, institutions, and peer tutors make meaning of their experiences and how these experiences impact their development and growth. Finally, this study illustrates an area of co-curricular involvement for high-achieving students that is important to understand and develop for the future of higher education in the United States. As more and more emphasis is placed on the growing population of academically underprepared college students, it may be easy for high-achieving students to feel bored and unchallenged in most college classrooms. Expanding and developing peer tutor programs grounded in research about the factors that make the experience meaningful and valuable to peer tutors will provide an opportunity to involve and retain high-achieving students. As this study suggests, peer tutor programs are an engaging way for colleges' and universities' best and brightest students to learn and grow socially, interpersonally, and academically. When structured correctly, tutor programs also provide a way for these students to feel integrated in the campus community and affirm that they serve an important role in impacting the academic success of fellow students. Investing in peer tutor programs will provide struggling students with an important resource, engage and grow high-achieving students, and allow the university to better retain, develop, and support the persistence of students across the span of academic achievement.

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Appendices

Appendix A-Interview Protocol

Warm-up question: *Any fun weekend plans?*

1. How and when did you become a peer tutor?
2. What was the application and interview process like?
3. What was the training process like?
4. What is the role of a peer tutor?
5. Tell me about your first few weeks as a peer tutor
 - a. How did it feel to adjust to this new role?
6. How is your tutoring program structured?
 - . Hours, compensation, requirements
7. What is it like to be a peer tutor at Lotus Blossom, in the context of the greater campus?
8. When you run into problems or questions when tutoring, who or what do you consult?
9. Tell me about a time that you felt tutoring was rewarding
 - . Similarly, tell me about a time you felt tutoring was not worth it or you had a negative experience with tutoring.
10. What, if any, social and interpersonal skills have been impacted by your tutoring experiences?
11. What, if any, academic skills have been impacted by your tutoring experiences?
12. How, if at all, has being a peer tutor impacted your college experience?
13. How, if at all, has being a peer tutor impacted your postgraduate plans?
14. What is it like to be a part of the tutor community?
15. Are there opportunities to discuss your tutor experiences?
16. Is there anything else important I should know about the experience of being a peer tutor?

Appendix B- Peer Tutor Coordinator Job Description:

Position Overview: This new position is responsible for organizing, coordinating, and centralizing all departmental peer tutoring operations during Fall and Spring semesters, reporting to the Dean of Student Success and Academic Support. This professional will be responsible for hiring, training, supporting, and overseeing peer tutors and tutoring services from academic departments across campus. This position also works closely with faculty to recruit tutors, communicate expectations to peer tutors regarding course assignments.

Principal duties include:

- Interview, hire, train, and supervise departmental peer tutors.
- Work closely with Department Faculty to select, train, and oversee peer tutors.
- Support departmental peer tutors and serve as a resource when questions or concerns arise.
- Coordinate, create, and communicate a schedule for tutoring hours to the campus community.
- Provide ongoing training for all departmental tutors utilizing standards of a tutoring association (example: College Reading and Learning Association).
- Facilitate monthly group meetings and discussions on the tutoring experience with all departmental peer tutors.
- Manage tutoring services budget.
- Review logs of tutoring appointments and ensure tutorial sessions run smoothly.
- Plan and coordinate end of the semester social events for departmental peer tutor community.
- Other duties as assigned.

Qualifications: A Master's Degree in education, psychology, counseling, or related field with 1-3 years of experience working with college students and/or in peer tutoring. The ideal candidate will possess knowledge and experience in best practices in peer tutoring, familiarity with College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA) or other tutoring association standards. The ideal candidate possesses strong organizational skills, ability to work with diverse students, creative thinking, group facilitation skills, and ability to collaborate and communicate with faculty across academic departments.

Appendix C- Departmental Peer Tutor Program Learning Outcomes

For departmental peer tutors:

- To gain knowledge of tools and resources to aide in their transition into and throughout their peer tutor role.
- To develop a thorough understanding of the tutor role.
- To understand the characteristics of a good tutorial session, what a tutor is and isn't, the importance of managing boundaries with tutees, and the importance of maintaining academic integrity when tutoring.
- To gain a strong tutor training foundation.
- To feel confident in their tutor abilities
- To feel supported by a community of other departmental peer tutors and the Peer Tutor Coordinator.
- To understand which resources to utilize when faced with questions, concerns, or issues when tutoring.
- To develop socially and academically from their tutoring experiences.

Appendix D- Tutor Mentor Program Learning Outcomes

For new tutors:

- To feel supported in their transition into the tutor role
- To form bounds with experienced tutors
- To have a thorough understanding of the tutor role
- To feel confident in this new role
- To enhance social and interpersonal skills development
- To reflect on their growth as a peer tutor, what did and did not go well, and how they can improve in the future.

For experienced tutor mentors:

- To gain leadership skills through mentoring a new tutor
- To grow socially and interpersonally
- To gain a new, more complex understanding of the tutor role through mentoring a new tutor
- To reflect on their own transition into tutoring and derive further meaning from their tutor experiences.